

Message Text

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12

ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 OES-03 PM-03 NSC-05 SP-02 SS-15

CIAE-00 INR-07 NSAE-00 PA-01 USIA-06 PRS-01 /066 W

----- 079348

R 050545Z AUG 75

FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4166

INFO AMEMBASSY ANKARA

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

DIA WASHDC

USCINCEUR

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BEIRUT PASS BAGHDAD

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: ECON, PFOR, SY, IZ

SUBJ: EUPHRATES WATER PROBLEM

1. SUMMARY: PRESS REPORTING RE WATER SHORTAGE IN ALEPPO HAS STEPPED UP MARKEDLY. SARG CLAIMS IT HAS BEEN OVER GENEROUS IN ALLOWING WATER TO FLOW TO IRAQ. APPARENTLY PROBLEM IS REAL AND AGGRAVATED BY FAILURE OF SARG TO EXPAND DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM TO KEEP UP WITH RAPID GROWTH OF ALEPPO. PRESS CAMPAIGN MAY BE PRECURSOR TO SARG AGAIN SHUTTING OFF SUPPLY OF URPHRATES WATER TO IRAQ. END SUMMARY.

2. SYRIAN PRESS PAST SEVERAL DAYS HAS FOCUSSED HEAVILY OF EUPHRATES WATER QUESTION WITH NEW FOCUS ON WATER SHORTAGES IN ALEPPO. MANY ARTICLES ON THE PROBLEM PRINTED LOCALLY ARE REPRINTS FROM ARTICLES APPEARING IN BEIRUT PRESS, I.E., AL-HAWADITH AND AL-ASH SHAAB (SYRIAN MOUTHPIECE). MOST STORIES APPEAR TO BE PLANTS OR AT LEAST DEPEND HEAVILY ON SYRIAN GOVERNMENTAL AND TECHNICAL SOURCES. WHILE TONE OF PRESS ARTICLES APPEARS TO "PROTESTETH TOO MUCH" NEVERTHELESS WATER SHORTAGE HAS APPARENTLY SERIOUSLY

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AFFECTED WATER AND ELECTRICAL POWER SUPPLY FOR ALEPPO.

3. PRESS STATEMENTS UNIFORMLY ASSERT THAT SYRIAN GENEROSITY AND CONCERN WITH REGIONAL CONSIDERATIONS SHOWN BY INCREASING THE FLOW OF WATER DOWNSTREAM TO IRAQ HAS CAUSED THE PROBLEM. WHILE WE HAVE SEEN NO EXPLICIT THREATS TO CUT OR REDUCE THE DOWNSTREAM FLOW THE IMPLICATION IN ALL REPORTAGE IS THAT IF ALEPPO AND SURROUNDING AREA IS TO HAVE ADEQUATE WATER (AND ELECTRICITY) THEN IRAQ MUST LEARN TO LIVE WITH LESS.

4. PRESS HAS GIVEN FOLLOWING REASONS FOR AND EFFECTS OF ALEPPO WATER CRISIS:

A. SYRIA IS RELEASING 50 TO 200 CUBIC METERS OF WATER PER SECOND MORE FROM LAKE ASAD THAN IT IS RECEIVING FROM TURKEY.

B. THIS HAS LOWERED LEVEL OF LAKE ASAD IMPOUNDMENT TO POINT WHERE SILT IS BLOCKING INTAKE PIPES AND OTHER COMPLICATIONS.

C. NET EFFECT IS THAT ALEPPO IS RECEIVING ONLY 100,000 CUBIC METERS OF WATER DAILY AGAINST ITS REQUIREMENT FOR 130,000.

D. SIX HUNDRED VILLAGES IN ALEPPO NEIGHBORHOOD ARE ALSO AFFECTED. THE LEVEL OF THE IMPOUNDMENT HAS ALMOST REACHED THE POINT WHERE HYDRO-ELECTRIC GENERATORS SUPPLYING POWER TO ALEPPO CAN NO LONGER BE OPERATED SAFELY.

E. CONTRIBUTING FACTOR IS REDUCED EUPHRATES FLOW DUE TO UNEXPECTED CONTINUING HIGH RATE OF STORAGE BY TURKS IN THE KABAN DAM. (MINISTER OF EUPHRATES DAM TOLD AMBASSADOR TURKS WERE

HAVING MULTITUDE OF PROBLEMS OWING TO FAULTY ENGINEERING STUDIES.)

5. PRESS NOTES THAT TURKEY PLANS CONSTRUCTION OF ADDITIONAL DAMS ON TRIBUTARIES OF EUPHRATES, THUS IMPLYING THAT THE SITUATION IS NOT GOING TO GET BETTER AND VERY LIKELY WILL LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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GET WORSE.

6. L'ORIENT-LE JOUR, BEIRUT FRENCH LANGUAGE DAILY REPORTED ON 3 AUGUST THAT SYRIAN AUTHORITIES HAVE DEVIDED ALEPPO INTO SEVEN AREAS, ONLY SIX OF WHICH RECEIVE WATER ON ANY GIVEN DAY. EMBASSY LOCAL EMPLOYEE SAYS THAT WHILE SITUATION THIS YEAR MAY BE SOMEWHAT WORSE THAN USUAL THIS IS COMMON PROCEDURE IN ALEPPO AT THIS TIME OF YEAR. AGGRAVATING FACTORS

SEEM TO BE RAPID POPULATION INCREASE IN ALEPPO AND INABILITY OF
SARG TO EXPAND WATER DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM TO ACCOMMODATE
RAPID GROWTH.

7. ANOTHER MAJOR THEME OF PRESS ACCOUNTS IS IRAQ'S PROFLIGATE
USE OF A VITAL RESOURCE. SYRIANS CLAIM THAT IRAQ IS DEMANDING
18 BILLION CUBIC METERS OF WATER ANNUALLY OF WHICH AT LEAST
HALF FLOWS USELESSLY INTO THE SHATT AL ARAB.

8. COMMENT: PRESS CAMPAIGN HAS, TO THIS POINT, DOWNPLAYED
THE POLITICAL AND CONCENTRATED ON THE TECHNICAL ASPECTS
OF THE PROBLEM. IT DOES SEEM CERTAIN HOWEVER THAT SYRIA
IS BUILDING PUBLIC CASE FOR AGAIN REDUCING DOWNSTREAM
FLOW AND IS CAREFULLY LAYING OUT RATIONALE FOR SUCH ACTION
IN SYRIAN AND "OBJECTIVE" FOREIGN MEDIA.

9. DECONTROL 8/4/76.
MURPHY

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: DISPUTES, INTERNATIONAL RIVERS, EUPHRATES RIVER, WATER DIVERSION
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 05 AUG 1975
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: ellisoob
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975DAMASC02979
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750269-0546
From: DAMASCUS
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19750879/aaaacrhm.tel
Line Count: 133
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: ellisoob
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 06 AUG 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <06 AUG 2003 by KelleyW0>; APPROVED <26 NOV 2003 by ellisoob>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
06 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: EUPHRATES WATER PROBLEM
TAGS: ECON, PFOR, SY, IZ
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 06 JUL 2006